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**FOR  
IMMEDIATE  
RELEASE**

**Veterans Who Need Routine Audiology Appointments at Lebanon VA Medical Center Now Able to Directly Schedule**

*Initiative Gets Veterans Into Hearing Appointments Quicker, Optometry To Follow Suit*

**For Immediate Release – Sept. 19, 2016**

LEBANON, Pa. – Veterans receiving care at Lebanon VA Medical Center are now able to directly schedule routine hearing appointments through the audiology clinic without a primary care referral – a move that eliminates multiple steps and gets Veterans into appointments quicker. The medical center is also working to implement the same initiative for optometry appointments by the end of 2016.

“This is a win-win for Veterans receiving audiology care through our medical center who will now be able to pick up the phone and directly schedule an audiology appointment and for the primary care providers who will now have more time to concentrate on care rather than generating audiology referrals,” said Dr. Teresa Wallace, audiology and speech pathology chief at LVAMC. “It is timely this initiative gets rolled out at Lebanon during Audiology Awareness Month. We look forward to continuing to provide world-class care through our audiology clinic that has ordered and fit over 5,000 hearing instruments since the end of 2015 and is staffed with nine excellent doctors of audiology.”

Lebanon’s VA Audiology Clinic, like others across the VA, order and fit only the most current, top-tier hearing instrument technology available from seven major hearing aid manufacturers. Eligible Veterans can now access direct care in the Audiology Clinic by calling (717) 272-6621 or 1-800-409-8771 and dialing extension 4582 or extension 4634. Veterans unsure about their VA health care eligibility can contact enrollment at extension 6000.

Before now, Veterans seeking appointments with audiologists had to first make an appointment with a primary care physician for a referral for a routine clinic consult visit. A clinic representative would contact the patient to set up the consult appointment, which could result in a several weeks’-long lag between the appointment and when the Veteran was actually seen. The new audiology process is part of the VA’s Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Initiative, which began as a successful pilot at three sites in 2015 and is being expanded to all VA Medical Centers.

“The Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Initiative allows Veterans who need eye and ear care to be seen sooner,” said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. “It also has the benefit of freeing up primary care physicians so access to primary care improves for other Veterans as well. This kind of process improvement is exactly the type of innovation we expected when we launched MyVA in 2014. In the end, we changed a VA process by considering the needs of our Veterans, a change that allows for more timely care and an improved Veteran experience.”

The Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Initiative is one of a number of efforts underway at VA to improve Veterans’ access to care and wait times. Among those recent accomplishments:

- VA and Choice contractors created more than 3.1 million authorizations for Veterans to receive care in the private sector from May 1, 2015, through April 30, 2016. This represents an eight percent increase in authorizations when compared to the same period in 2014/2015.

- In FY 2015, 12 percent of all Veterans enrolled for VA care received telehealth-based care. This includes more than 2 million telehealth visits touching 677,000 Veterans; 45 percent of these Veterans live in rural areas.
- In FY 2015, more than 6,300 Veterans accessed VA care through live interactive video telehealth from home.
- VA has activated over 3.9 million square feet of space in the past two years.
- We've increased authorizations for care in the community 46 percent in the past two years.
- Clinic production is up 10 percent as measured by the same productivity standard used by many private-sector healthcare systems. This increase translates into roughly 20 million additional hours of care for Veterans.
- As we improve access to care, more and more Veterans are choosing VA care — for the quality, for the convenience, or for the cost-savings so even though we're completing millions more appointments, we continue to have more work to do.
- VA has increased salaries for physicians and dentists to close the pay gap with the private sector and to make VA an employer of choice. With more competitive salaries, VA will be better positioned to retain and hire more health care providers to care for Veterans.

“We want our Veterans and those who care for them to know that we are doing everything that we can to improve their experience with VA and to provide the care our Veterans deserve in a thoughtful and timely way,” said VA Under Secretary Dr. David J. Shulkin. “We have made progress, but know there is more work to be done. This Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Initiative is one of many initiatives underway to improve Veterans access to care.”

The Audiology and Optometry Direct Scheduling Initiative is expected to be fully operational within all VA Medical Centers nationwide by the end of 2016.

The Lebanon VA Medical Center is one of 152 medical centers in the nation with the sole purpose of providing world-class medical care to America's veterans. If you are veteran, you may be eligible to receive care and benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. To learn more, call 717-228-6000.

For more information about the Lebanon VA Medical Center, visit [www.lebanon.va.gov](http://www.lebanon.va.gov), like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/VALebanon](https://www.facebook.com/VALebanon), or follow us on Twitter as [www.twitter.com/VALebanon](https://www.twitter.com/VALebanon).

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